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United Nations

United Nations Environment Programme

Report of the Governing Council

Twenty-third session (21-25 February 2005)

General Assembly

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Addendum

Appendix

President's summary of the discussions by ministers and heads of delegation at the twenty-third session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme: contribution to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration

Summary

Ministers and heads of delegation of 133 United Nations Member States met at the twenty-third session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi from 21 to 25 February 2005 to discuss the environmental underpinnings of the Millennium Development Goals and to put forward recommendations for their accelerated and sustainable achievement to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, in September 2005.

The deliberations were carried out under the leadership of the President of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (Rachmat Witoelar, Indonesia), with the assistance of ministers from Barbados, the Congo, Hungary, Pakistan, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Following presentations by distinguished speakers, including Jeffrey Sachs, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General and head of the Millennium Project, Achim Steiner, Director-General, World Conservation Union and Rejoice Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Environment of South Africa, ministers and heads of delegation addressed the implementation of the following Millennium Development Goals:

(a) Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (environment and poverty);

(b) Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability (in relation to water, sanitation and human settlements);

(c) Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women (gender and environment).

A rich, wide-ranging and interactive debate took place, which underscored the conviction of all ministers and heads of delegation that heightened attention needed to be given to the environmental underpinnings of the Millennium Development Goals in the future implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in particular in respect of goals and targets that were complementary to the Millennium Development Goals. Ministers and heads of delegation were also unanimous in their view that specific and prioritized actions were required to ensure that environmental sustainability was an integral part of the strategy for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals that should emerge from the High-level Plenary Meeting later in the year. The present summary by the President attempts to draw on the major thrusts of the

discussion among ministers and heads of delegation attending the meeting, rather than provide a consensus view on all points.

In this conviction, and recognizing the Jeju Initiative, ministers and heads of delegation requested the President of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to convey his summary to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations for submission to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the Assembly at its sixtieth session, as the contribution of the ministers of environment assembled at the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

1. The High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly has assumed critical significance for reinvigorating action in respect of the central challenge — to us all as a global community — of achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. If those goals are to be achieved in a sustainable manner, recognition that environmental sustainability underpins their achievement must be at the heart of further efforts of the international community. This should be facilitated by increased cooperation between the United Nations system and international financial institutions. The strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and further development of international environmental governance is a particularly important requirement for putting in place strong institutional arrangements capable of ensuring that environmental sustainability considerations can be mainstreamed.

A. Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (environment and poverty)

2. We fundamentally depend on natural ecosystems and resources provided by watersheds and aquifers, coastal and marine ecosystems, mountains, forests, soils and the atmosphere. These resources continue to be threatened as our current patterns of consumption and production undermine the sustainability of the resource base upon which we depend.

3. Extreme poverty, degradation of natural resources and global environmental change combine to form a vicious downward spiral that can undermine all development efforts and heighten potential threats of conflict and insecurity at all levels, including by increasing vulnerability in small island developing States. Investment in environmental and natural resource sustainability has been proved to yield very high returns in the long term. Political decision-making circles, however, have continued to give disproportionate priority to investments with short-term returns, without recognizing that such investments may not contribute to breaking the cycle of extreme poverty and environmental degradation in the long term.

4. The failure to operationalize the link between environmental sustainability and the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 1, is evident in current poverty reduction strategies, national development plans and subnational and sectoral development plans and policies in developing countries. Political pressures lead to the prioritization of investment with short term and sectoral orientations in situations of extreme poverty. The severely constrained fiscal space in which many developing countries operate can also prevent the integration of environmental sustainability considerations into such plans and strategies.

5. In addition, investment-related information, particularly on financial and economic costs and benefits, remains extremely limited, thus further constraining environment-related investment.

6. The aspirations of the international community embodied in the Millennium Declaration and in summits over recent years, and endorsed by heads of State and Government, can be met only through a vastly increased effort. The international community should develop a costed, targeted and financed investment plan, and must revitalize commitment to improved governance and the rule of law.

1. Recommendations for countries and the international community

7. The High-level Plenary Meeting should endorse the systematic integration of environmental sustainability considerations into all national poverty reduction strategies, United Nations development assistance frameworks and national development plans, taking into account the World Summit on Sustainable Development target for the development of national sustainable development strategies.

8. Further efforts should be made to provide the economic rationale for investment in environmental sustainability. An analytical framework that integrates environmental costs and benefits, and also the cost of inaction in decision-making, should be developed for this purpose.

9. The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building should be financed and implemented to meet its objective of substantially increasing the capacity of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to monitor and assess environmental trends.

10. Substantially increasing the financial base of the Global Environment Facility is critically important and should be seriously considered.

11. The debilitating burden of debt experienced by developing countries must be eliminated or substantially alleviated to allow countries to invest in programmes to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in an environmentally sustainable manner, particularly in least developed countries, poor mountainous countries and heavily indebted poor countries. The Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum notes with encouragement current efforts by the international community in this regard.

12. Innovative financial mechanisms such as the International Finance Facility, carbon off-setting, emissions trading, international taxation and the potential of debt-for-nature swaps should be further explored.

13. Developed countries must step up efforts to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance, to make available the necessary financing to scale up Millennium Development Goal-related investment.

14. The fulfilment of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and related development goals, including those contained in the Mauritius Plan of Action, should be expedited on the basis of a clear and prioritized plan with a corresponding set of actions, programmes and investments at all levels and with clear responsibilities for all actors and indicators for monitoring, to strengthen the contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

15. Involvement of the poor, particularly the rural poor, women and youth in the development of environmentally sound strategies for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the local and community levels should be ensured, as a central component of the success of such strategies.

16. Innovative mechanisms, including microfinance, equitable tax incentives and the involvement of civil society should be further explored to enhance local ownership and commitment to such strategies. Partnerships with the private sector

and other actors and civil society should be further pursued, building on experience gained since the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

17. Trade and aid measures should be mutually supportive. Urgent measures should be taken to remove barriers to trade and agricultural subsidies in developed countries that have a negative impact on developing countries' commodity exports. Measures to reduce trade barriers constitute a mutual responsibility. Such measures, combined with efforts to raise agricultural productivity in developing countries, will contribute to relieving pressure on natural resources.

18. International financial institutions and development cooperation agencies should integrate principles of environmental sustainability into their policies and programmes. Environmental considerations should also be factored into foreign direct investment and trade policies as drivers of development.

19. The scientific and financial base of UNEP should be strengthened to meet the challenge of integrating environmental sustainability into development policies.

2. Recommendations for the United Nations Environment Programme

20. The environment and poverty initiative of UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) should be a key mechanism for assisting developing countries in fully integrating environmental sustainability into poverty reduction and development strategies. The initiative will require long-term commitment and adequate financing. The coordination role of UNEP in the United Nations system, as well as its participation in the United Nations Development Group, should be strengthened.

21. The memorandum of understanding between UNEP and UNDP should be implemented as a matter of priority, and the capacity of UNEP to support and provide technical advice to Governments at the national level should be enhanced.

22. UNEP should enhance its cooperation with international financial institutions, and also with specialized agencies and programmes in the United Nations system.

B. Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability (in relation to water, sanitation and human settlements)

23. Increased investment in environmentally sustainable water, sanitation and human settlements programmes has multiple dividends benefiting women, the poor and the environment.

24. Water is perhaps the most fundamental of all environmental resources and key to the viability and long-term sustainability of the world's ecosystems. Ecosystem health is critical to the quantity and quality of water supply. Human activities, such as environmentally damaging infrastructure development, modification of river flows, deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, over-fishing, introduction of invasive alien species and release of pollutants, can upset this delicate balance.

25. Several threats to overall ecosystem health, and consequently to the ability of ecosystems to provide the materials upon which human life depends, are particularly relevant to water resources. The illegal transboundary movement of toxic materials and chemicals and hazardous waste also threatens ecosystems and human health.

26. The link between environmentally sustainable water management and poverty reduction is critical and must be prioritized to ensure that appropriate action is taken. The United Nations system-wide *World Water Development Report* highlighted the continued deterioration in freshwater resources, as well as the links between water and achievement of the internationally agreed goals of the Millennium Declaration.

27. The costs of environmentally unsustainable water use through pollution and excess water withdrawals are insufficiently recognized and quantified and are often very high — water that has been clean and usable for generations has been rendered unfit for human consumption in a few short years, causing illnesses and death from water-borne diseases. Millions die every year from water-borne diseases, which in some countries account for a high proportion of total illnesses. Environmentally unsustainable water use has a disproportionate impact on women and children, whose needs must be accorded the highest priority.

1. Recommendations for countries and the international community

28. Countries should ensure the broader cross-sectoral attendance of ministers at the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in view of the environment-and-development linkages among water, sanitation and human settlements. The identification of clear follow-up responsibilities could facilitate implementation of the outcomes of the Commission's thirteenth session.

29. It is vital to achieve environmentally sustainable water use, and the application of integrated water resources management, including ecosystem approaches, is the appropriate process for that purpose.

30. The costs of environmentally unsustainable water use must be quantified.

31. Environmental valuation of ecosystem goods and services should become a core component of water-management strategies.

32. While increased investment in infrastructure at the national level is vital, there should be a clear recognition of the need for more affordable, smaller-scale and environmentally sustainable infrastructure that targets the needs of the poor as the highest priority. Governments, donors and international financial institutions should ensure that adequate investment is available to mitigate the negative environmental consequences of large infrastructure development.

33. The vulnerability of slum-dwellers should be reduced through the promotion of land-use planning policies aimed at environmental sustainability and risk reduction. Improved sanitation should be of high priority, employing small-scale solutions in urban areas and the exchange of best practices.

34. Ecosystem approaches increase the availability of clean water and should be an integral part of actions to supply the poor with clean water and adequate sanitation.

35. Countries should encourage the development at all levels, including water vendors and community-based management, of water supply and access that meet the needs of the poorest.

36. The international community should meet its commitment to increase the flow of financial resources. Improved institutional mechanisms and governance in

relation to water are important in mobilizing funds, but substantive increases in donor assistance are also required and must be complemented by capacity-building at all levels.

2. Recommendations for the United Nations Environment Programme

37. UNEP should increase its support for the achievement of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation target of integrated water resources management and efficiency plans by 2005, with support provided to developing countries, including through capacity-building and with partners such as UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), other United Nations agencies and the Global Water Partnership.

38. Progress in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the marine and freshwater biodiversity targets of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation should be monitored by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, as mandated by the Convention on Biological Diversity, and regularly reported to relevant intergovernmental bodies.

39. UNEP should also provide support for the establishment of regional ministerial bodies on water, such as the African Ministers' Council on Water.

40. UNEP should work with UNDP and through the United Nations Development Group to ensure that environmentally sustainable water use is integrated into poverty reduction strategies and national development plans.

41. UNEP should focus more on drawing together different voices and partners.

42. UNEP should be more active in international forums, such as the Economic and Social Council and the international financial institutions, in the endeavour to drive home the vital contribution of environmental sustainability in meeting water and other targets.

C. Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women (gender and environment)

43. Sustainable development is not possible without the empowerment of women and gender equality. This means that gender equality is not only a question of social justice, but is also instrumental to and a precondition of economic empowerment, environmental management and sustainable development.

44. Women are those most affected by environmental degradation, such as chemical contamination and indoor air pollution. They are also most vulnerable to natural disasters. Women are also among the poorest of the poor, but nonetheless are strong drivers of change.

45. Addressing this situation will require concerted action by all those involved, building on initiatives such as Women as the Voice of the Environment and the Network of Women Ministers for the Environment.

1. *Recommendations for countries and the international community*

46. Gender equality should be mainstreamed at all levels in strategies, policies and programmes, including in poverty reduction strategies.

47. Women and girls should be empowered through education and capacity-building, not just in environment but in all fields. The elimination of illiteracy, adult basic education and education in the areas of health, preventive medicine and sanitation are essential. Maximum use should be made of mentorship and indigenous knowledge. Gender equality and environment should be included in school curricula for women and men alike.

48. Barriers to the education of women and girls — for example, lack of sanitation in schools — should be identified and removed.

49. Women should be equally represented and fully involved in environmental decision-making at all levels. They should be involved from the outset of the planning process and have full access to environmental information. Women should be equally represented in leadership positions, from the grass-roots to the national and international levels, in all sectors, including environment. Men should be actively involved in the empowerment of women.

50. Barriers to women's participation and leadership should be identified and removed.

51. Governments and the international community should focus on the priority international commitments that affect women, notably those relating to chemicals, heavy metals, water, sanitation and human settlements.

52. Women should enjoy equal access to economic activities, market opportunities, land tenure and natural resources.

53. Governments and international organizations should strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

2. Recommendation for the United Nations Environment Programme

54. UNEP, in collaboration with UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and other United Nations bodies and with national Governments, should play a stronger role in the field of gender and environment in, among other areas, education, participation and assessment.

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